



**National Center for Youth in Custody (NC4YC)  
Technical Assistance Report: New Hampshire  
August 2013**

**I. Technical Assistance Requestor and Provider Information**

Requestor's Name, Title, Organization and Contact Information: Pamela L. Sullivan, Juvenile Justice Specialist, New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Division for Children, Youth and Families, Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services.

Date of Request: May 7, 2013

Source of Request: Request transferred to the National Center for Youth in Custody (NC4YC) on May 17, 2013 by the OJJDP National Training & Technical Assistance Center (NTTAC).

Technical Assistance Provider's Name, Title, Organization, and Contact Information: Ned Loughran, NC4YC Co-Director and Executive Director of the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators, 781-843-2663, ned.loughran@cjca.net; Dave Crowley, Performance-based Standards Coach, dcrowley@pbstandards.org

**II. Nature of Request**

On May 7, 2013, Pamela Sullivan, Juvenile Justice Specialist at the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services submitted a request for technical assistance to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention National Training and Technical Assistance Center. In the initial request, Ms. Sullivan requested a review of "current Center programs...to determine what works, what doesn't, the Sununu Youth Service Center's (SYSC) use of Evidence-based Programs (EBP), what funding sources are available for programming and what other states provide for services/programming at their respective state centers."

On May 17, 2013, the National Training and Technical Assistance Center transferred the technical assistance project to the National Center for Youth in Custody (NC4YC). NC4YC Co-Director Ned Loughran then followed up with DCYF staff who further refined the scope of the technical assistance request. DCYF Director Maggie Bishop requested an evaluation of the Sununu Youth Services Center (SYSC) to assist in accomplishing her vision of transitioning of the center from a correctional model to a clinical, treatment-based model. Director Bishop articulated this vision for the SYSC clearly, and stated several goals targeted at achieving it, including but not limited to: increased opportunities for family engagement; enhanced educational, vocational, and college preparation services; seamless transitional and re-entry



planning and programs and policies, practices and communication strategies that support safe, secure, and therapeutic environments for residents. To this end, Director Bishop requested that NC4YC evaluate current SYSC programs, practices and operations, and provide recommendations for improvement. Sherri Levesque, Administrator of the DCYF Bureau of Organizational Learning and Quality Improvement, also asked NC4YC to assess whether placement at the SYSC is (1) “the most effective way to serve these youth,” and (2) “the most cost-effective way to serve them.”

### **III. Circumstances Leading to Request**

According to Ms. Sullivan, the New Hampshire state legislature requested that the New Hampshire Division for Children, Youth and Families, Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services conduct a review of the current Center programs. The technical assistance is requested to assist the agency develop its presentation to the legislature on the facility’s programs.

### **IV. Identified Goals of the Technical Assistance Project**

Goals of the technical assistance project include:

- Assess current programming and services at the Sununu Youth Services Center;
- Share information regarding best practices and promising approaches; and
- Provide recommendations to guide the agency’s report to the state legislature.

### **V. Description of Assistance Provided**

After receiving the request for technical assistance, NC4YC Co-Director Ned Loughran communicated by phone with Sherri Levesque, Administrator, Bureau of Organizational Learning and Quality Improvement regarding the scope of the TA. Prior to the site visit, he met with the SYSC Planning Group at the administration building in Manchester on June 7 to learn about the work of the planning group and discuss the scope of the facility review and any documents needed to complete the review.

#### Meetings and Site Visits

Mr. Loughran and Mr. Crowley conducted a comprehensive site visit to the facility from June 24, 2013 to June 27, 2013. During the visit, Mr. Loughran and Mr. Crowley toured the facility, observed programming and operations and interviewed administrators, staff and youth residents.

#### People Interviewed

Maggie Bishop, Director, New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Division for Children, Youth and Families  
Penny Sampson – Director, John Sununu Youth Services Center (SYSC)

Gail Snow - Bureau Chief, Clinical and Residential  
Sherri Levesque – Administrator, Bureau of Organizational Learning and Quality Improvement  
Carol Gay – Clinical Coordinator  
Claire Pstragowski, School Principal  
Eric Skillings, Training Unit, Bureau of Organizational Learning and Quality Improvement  
Letricia Conrad, Unit manager  
Jay Mackey, Youth Counselor - Acting Unit Manager at the time of the interview  
Norm Larochelle - Treatment Coordinator  
Rachel DeVita - Treatment Coordinator  
Dr. Barnett, Psychiatrist  
MK Lance Paquette, Youth Counselor  
Josh Leonard – Youth Counselor

#### List of Documents Reviewed

- i. John H. Sununu Youth Services Center Secure Treatment Program
- ii. FFY 2013 Formula Grant Update: Analysis of Juvenile Crime Problem
- iii. Juvenile Crime Analysis Report 2009-2011
- iv. John H. Sununu Youth Services Center, Division for Children Youth and Families, Parent and Youth Handbook
- v. Psycho/Social intake Assessment Form
- vi. Trauma Informed Treatment at SYSC
- vii. Opening Doors: Power Point presentation on Trauma Informed Treatment at the Sununu Youth Services Center
- viii. Permanency Unit Referral
- ix. Table that describes program for detained youth
- x. Table that describes program for committed youth
- xi. Services at Girls Unit at SYSC
- xii. Description of the “Honest Minds” program, a group youths on the F unit participate in to understand delinquency/criminality as a personality disorder
- xiii. Psychosocial Intake Assessment
- xiv. Draft Policy on Rules, Discipline and Restorative Justice for Secure Residential Services
- xv. Draft Policy on De-escalation and Interventions for Secure Residential Services – Safety and Security
- xvi. Draft Policy on Crisis Services Unit for Secure Residential Unit
- xvii. Education Department Informational Packet
- xviii. NH Department of Health and Human Services, Division for Children Youth and Families SYSC and Juvenile Justice Field Bureaus: Juvenile Probation and Parole Institute & Professional Foundation Curriculum Schedule
- xix. Part-Time Summer Help Academy 2013

### **3. Background, Findings and Recommendations**

#### *Background*



Located in Manchester, New Hampshire, the John H. Sununu Youth Services Center (SYSC) is a secure residential facility that houses youths who have been adjudicated delinquent by the New Hampshire Circuit Court and committed to the care of the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Division for Children, Youth and Families, Sununu Youth Services Center (SYSC). Youths placed in SYSC range from age 13 to 17. The facility has a bed capacity of 144, and in recent years it has maintained an average resident population of approximately 70 youths. According to SYSC, residents stay an average of eight to 12 months prior to release. The facility offers youth a wide array of programs and services, including education, health, and clinical services.

**Current Population of SYSC:**

Boys Detention – 5  
Boys Committed – 38  
Girls Detention - 4  
Girls Committed – 14  
Total – 61

**Configuration of Units:**

E Unit – Girls  
F 0 Unit – Intensive  
F 1 Unit – Transition  
G 0 Unit – Drug/Alcohol  
G 1 Unit – Mentoring Office  
G 2 Unit – Behavioral  
H 0 Unit – Boys Detained  
H 1 Unit – Crisis Services  
H 2 Unit – Girls Detained

**Visiting Hours:**

Monday – Girls Unit 6:30 – 7:30 PM  
Tuesday – Detained Unit (boys and girls) 6:30 – 7:30 PM  
Wednesday – G Unit 6:30-7:30 PM  
Thursday – F Unit 6:30-7:30 PM  
Friday – No Visits  
Saturday – Detained 1:00 – 2:30 PM; Girls 3:00-4:40 PM  
Sunday – F Unit 1:000-2:30 PM; G Unit 3:00-4:30 PM

Based on an extensive review of facility programs, policies, and procedures, as well as a comprehensive site visit, this report offers findings and recommendations across the following areas:

- Facility Culture
- Treatment Programs
- Family and Youth Engagement
- Education Program



- Behavior Management
- Staff Training and Support

### *Facility Culture*

The Sununu Youth Services Center is in the midst of a culture change process from a correctional incident>hearing>consequence>sanction>isolation process to an individualized, restorative and rehabilitative treatment focus. Conversations with administrators, staff and residents revealed varying degrees of understanding of and success in accomplishing the culture transformation. Administrators seem confident that the recent paradigm shift in policy and practice is widely accepted and followed. Yet, administrators recognize that additional training and support is needed for guidance, skill building and clarity of direction, especially in implementing the new behavior management system that spells out rewards and sanctions.

Policy Changes – Staff seem confused about recent policy changes, especially regarding the use of room confinement/isolation. They feel that communication about the changes needs to improve. Staff appear to be willing to embrace the corrections to rehabilitation shift in philosophy and direction, but desire better communication about the new direction and more extensive training in new policies and procedures. One staff member thought that administration could be more visible around the facility. Ironically a number of residents interviewed desired more discipline and consistency from staff. One youth stated: “Consequences keep getting lighter and lighter.” Another resident observed that the program had changed from “strict to more normal” and added “Staff had learned to use alternatives to room confinement.”

This sentiment could be due to residents’ perception of staff uncertainty over changes in disciplinary policy, their acceptance of a correctional approach or their not feeling safe in the facility. According to the Performance-based Standards (PbS) site report of April 2013, 21 percent of the youths surveyed feared for their safety. This was eight (8) percent lower than survey results from the Oct. 2012 report, but six (6) percent higher than the previous year’s survey results. Conversely, 43 percent of staff expressed fear for their safety in the most recent data collection, which was 18 percent higher than the Oct. 2012 survey results and 17 percent higher than the previous year’s survey results.

Staff-Youth Relationships – Youths generally feel that the majority of staff care about them and are good role models to follow. One resident stated: “Some staff are helpful; some staff are not helpful.” Another singled out one staff member for being very supportive by helping him through the program, especially in managing his anger. The youth, who expects to be transitioned to a group residence appreciates the program, feels he is managing his anger, has learned to respect others and has received good grades in school. Staff and youths repeatedly cited the staff shortages for hindering development of trusting staff/youth relationships, frequency of outdoor fresh air activities and campus privileges for those who achieve the first trust level. Staff and youths fully supported the trust level incentive system:

- Level I – campus privileges



- Level 2 - community privileges
- Level 3 - furlough home

#### Findings:

- Facility is transitioning to a culture of individualized, rehabilitative, restorative treatment;
- Mission, values, and philosophy, reflected in policy, procedure, and protocols;
- Administration largely viewed positively by staff; and
- Youths generally regard the staff as caring, helpful and good role models.

#### Recommendations:

- Administration should continue to have regular presence on the grounds;
- Sharpen communication regarding youth behavioral expectations, incentives, and accountability; and
- Focus on effective communications up and down the chain of command with clear lines of communications for understanding, quality assurance and positive recognition.

#### *Treatment Programs*

In order to achieve the above stated culture change, the administration is developing a comprehensive treatment model consisting of treatment interventions based on evidence-based models or principles. Youths and staff spoke of their understanding of the various treatment programs – “Honest Minds,” Dialectical Behavior Treatment (DBT), Trauma Informed Treatment, Emotional Management/ Anger Management, Family Therapy, Restorative Circles and Substance Abuse Treatment. Comments from youths on participating in groups and individual therapy ranged from very helpful, especially in helping youth to manage anger, to repetitive.

One resident stated that the emotional management group helps her develop coping skills. The same resident would like to participate in more groups to help her “understand why [she does] certain things and how to fix them.” Many state youth corrections programs around the country utilize the above treatment programs with the exception of Honest Minds, which was developed by Norm Larochelle at SYSC. Additional programs that other jurisdictions utilize are: Cognitive Behavioral Treatment (CBT), Effective Practices in Community Supervision and Collaborative Problem Solving, a program developed by Ross Green at Harvard University. The Maine juvenile division of the Department of Corrections used Collaborative Problem Solving to



help transform the culture at its two training schools in the late 1990s. More recently, the Oregon Youth Authority is utilizing Collaborative Problem Solving in its programs.

Changing Profile of the SYSC Population - SYSC, like most youth corrections facilities throughout the country, has experienced an influx of youths with serious emotional and mental health problems. Many of these youths also have a co-occurring disorder of substance and/or alcohol abuse. These high needs youths tend to do better in specialized units with adequately trained staff similar to the H 1 Crisis Management Unit at SYSC. Staff reported that 44 residents, more than half the Center's census, were taking prescribed psychotropic medications. Dr. Barnett, the part-time psychiatrist was reviewing the use of psychotropic medication at the facility. Although many of these low risk/ high needs offenders could be treated in community programs, interviews with several of the residents and a review of the presenting charges at the time of placement at SYSC indicated that many of these youths had run away from several community placements before being committed to SYSC.

Staff working with youths with serious emotional and mental health problems should receive intensive training in order to better understand and meet the complex needs of this group. The National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice ([www.ncmhjj.com](http://www.ncmhjj.com)) developed a curriculum to train staff in juvenile justice facilities who work with this group of adolescents. The training is called *Mental Health Training for Juvenile Justice Professionals*, and was developed by mental health and juvenile justice experts. The eight-hour training is designed for a range of juvenile justice staff including probation, detention and youth corrections.

Medicaid Funding - The DCYF administration has expressed an interest in pursuing Medicaid funding for youths at SYSC, especially since a mental health profile for nearly 60 percent of the resident population dominates. Currently federal law forbids federal Medicaid funding from being used to pay for care or services for inmates of a public institution (Social Security Act: 1905(a)(28)(A)). Most Medicaid agencies ensure compliance with federal law by changing youth's eligibility as they move in and out of an institution, either by terminating or suspending eligibility. A number of states have established policies and procedures that allow youth to quickly and easily enroll into Medicaid while they are still in an institution and preparing to discharge, so that by the time they leave, they are enrolled and may access services the day they are released. This is important so that youths with mental health and substance abuse issues or serious health problems, can continue treatment immediately upon release from an institution e.g., Washington Juvenile Rehabilitation Agency, Colorado Division of Juvenile Corrections, Texas Juvenile Justice Department and Oregon Youth Authority.

During the site visit, Dave Crowley, also PbS coach for the Vermont Department of Children and Families (DCF) shared that DCF had converted the Woodside Secure Treatment Unit (20-beds), its only facility for juvenile offenders, into a mental health program. Consequently Medicaid funds 90 percent of the program costs, while the Vermont Department of Education funds the remaining 10 percent. As far as the reviewers know, the Vermont facility is the only secure treatment facility in the country that has federal health care coverage for its residents.

#### Findings:

- SYSC offers a comprehensive and effective array of treatment programs (Honest Minds, Restorative Circles, Family Therapy, Emotional Empathy, Compassion, Pet Therapy, AA, NA, etc.);
- Programs are targeted to challenging, high needs resident population:
  - Administrators and clinical staff report increasing numbers of residents with mental health issues; 44 of 72 residents on medication;
  - Large percentage diagnosed with trauma related issues (female residents with higher rates);
  - A number of youth have run from multiple residential placements; and
- Given the resident profile, administrators are interested in seeking Medicaid funding.

#### Recommendations:

- Create written curricula/materials/manuals for programs, including Honest Minds and Restorative Circles;
- Evaluate optimal use of facility space for programming, and develop plan for unused space;
- Continue to follow through on Medicaid funding possibilities; and
- Assess whether additional programs might serve the resident population:
  - One resident expressed interest in the facility providing Driver's education and employment assistance programming.

#### *Family and Youth Engagement*

The historic wall in facilities separating delinquent youths and their families is coming down. As a result of research and persistence of family advocates, most juvenile justice professionals are recognizing that families need to be engaged in their children's rehabilitation. Two reports released in the last year, one "Families Unlocking Futures: Solutions to the Crisis in Juvenile Justice" from Justice for Families (J4F), a national alliance of local organizations composed of families of incarcerated youths and the other "FAMILIES Come First" from the Campaign for



youth Justice (C4YJ) have made compelling arguments for collaboration between juvenile justice professionals and families of youths in the system.

Director Bishop has made integrating families into the life of the Sununu Center a high priority. She is considering developing a Family Center for parents of youth in the facility. She would also like to get the parent voice and youth voice into the facility. Currently, one of the treatment components is Family Therapy conducted by a facility clinician for a youth and his/her parent(s). Also, the Center is one of 48 facilities from 15 states that volunteered to begin to collect outcome data for the newest set of Performance-based Standards, Family Engagement and Social Support Standards during this past April's data collection. As part of the data collection, families were given climate surveys similar to the ones administered to staff and youths to complete.

An example from another state youth corrections agency that has made family engagement a priority is the Indiana Division of Youth Services (DYS). The Pendleton Center developed a Facility Improvement Plan in conjunction with its PbS participation to increase the rate of visitation. Staff analyzed their visitation policies and schedule and opened visitation to just about any time a family member could get to the facility. The number of visits nearly doubled in six months. The Pendleton administration saw improved behavior by youths in the same period. The facility also used data from the family surveys to address the issue of families not being involved in treatment and reentry plans. Counselors began calling parents to discuss progress and behavior issues. The administration created a Family Council called *Parent Information and Education Session* (PIES) to improve communications that led to establishing periodic Family Fun Nights

#### Findings:

- The Sununu Center is beginning to explore ways to involve families in their children's treatment plans and reintegration planning; and
- Family engagement strategies could be increased—Director Bishop expressed interest in better integrating families, and empowering parent and youth voices.

#### Recommendations:

- Establish Youth Advisory Council—youth can advise administration on issues affecting resident life, nominate and select staff/residents of the month, etc.;
- Develop plan for increased family engagement—resources include PbS Family-Youth Initiative, Campaign for Youth Justice's "FAMILY Comes First" publication and Justice for Families report "Families Unlocking Futures: Solutions to the Crisis in Juvenile Justice"; and



- Establish a Family Education Center similar to the one developed in Indiana DYS.

### *Education Program*

The Sununu Center is a Special Education School approved through 2015. The students are identified as Emotionally Disturbed and/or Learning Disabled and have Mental Health issues. According to the SYSC School Guidelines and Information packet, the residents are divided into four distinct populations that cannot be combined socially or academically due to either their status or for behavioral reasons:

1. Committed Students;
2. Detained Students;
3. Stabilization Unit Students (students with the most serious mental health issues); and
4. Unit utilized for students requiring "Time-Outs", crisis interventions, school removal or 1 on 1 instruction.

### Individualized Schools within SYSC:

1. Committed School Academic & Vocational Program;
2. Detained School Academic Program;
3. Stabilization Unit Academic Program; and
4. Unit utilized for Time-Out, Crisis Intervention and Removal (1 on 1 tutoring and mentoring).

The Sununu Center offers a comprehensive school program throughout the year.

- Regular School Program – 7:15 AM – 3:00 PM (7 period school day); and
- Summer School program – 9:00 AM – 2:30 PM.

The New Hampshire Special Education Program Approval process determined that teacher to youth ratio of 1:8 was required for this population. School personnel work closely with local schools to re-enroll youths in school immediately after release from SYSC. School is integrated into the behavior management program; the goal is to get youth back into the classroom from the Crisis Services Unit.

Youths generally liked the school program. One youth said that she had learned to value school from her experience at the Center. However a couple of residents stated that they were not sufficiently challenged by the school program. One resident expressed the desire to learn more about life skills in the school program.

Unfortunately the site visit coincided with a two-week school vacation, which prevented the reviewers from observing the school in session. It did not appear that many activities were planned to engage the youths during the normal school hours. Several of the youths complained of boredom during the vacation. Staffing shortages made it difficult for unit staff to take youths outside for fresh air and large muscle activity.



We toured the school, classrooms and vocational education shops. Again, because it was a vacation week, we were unable to observe academic and vocational classes in progress.

Findings:

- Comprehensive school program that includes guidance counseling, special education services, and apprenticeship/vocational opportunities (e.g., automotive, culinary arts, wood working and gardening);
- Teacher to youth ratio is 1:2 (30 certified teachers for 61 youths)
- Youths receive individual credit recovery assistance; and
- Some residents complete college-level work.

Recommendation:

- Ensure that education program is fully integrated into facility-wide rehabilitative approach (e.g., increase joint trainings and events with teachers and facility line staff); and
  - Enhance collaboration regarding youth transition issues.
- *Behavior Management*

The reviewers addressed issues that have arisen regarding the promulgation, understanding and acceptance of the Behavior Management program, especially the use of isolation, in the earlier section on Culture Change. SYSC's draft policy on Rules, Discipline and Restorative Justice clearly articulates a philosophy that reinforces the only reason isolation or room confinement should be used, viz., if a youth is in danger to hurt himself or another. It should not be used for punishment and it should be discontinued when a youth is ready to return to program.

Despite some of the communication and training issues that seem apparent at the facility, a review of the PbS site report for April 2013 demonstrates that the use and duration of isolation/room confinement is declining. Order 8 measures the use of isolation per 100 person-days of youth confinement. SYSC utilized isolation/room confinement at a rate of 0.655 (1 confinement), down from 7.526 (12 confinements in Oct. 2012). Use of confinement at SCYC was well below the field average of 3.93 (7 confinements). Order 9 measures the average duration of isolation/room confinement. The average duration of confinement at SCYC in April 2013 was 1.94 hours, showing a downtrend since April 2012. Order 10 measures the percent of youths removed from isolation in four hours or less. The April 2013 site report shows that 100 percent of the youths placed in isolation/room confinement were removed in four hours or less.

#### Findings:

- The PbS site report for April 2013 demonstrates that the use and duration of isolation/room confinement is declining; and
- Implementation of Behavioral Management Level System is worth reviewing;
  - One staff reported that consequences are inconsistent depending on staff.

#### Recommendations:

- Ensure that youth accountability measures are fair, immediate, and consistent;
- Employ incentive-based systems to guide behavior (e.g., token economies);
- Provide staff with training on behavioral management strategies
  - One Unit Manager specifically expressed interest in receiving additional training on behavioral management.

#### *Staff Training and Support*

Staff receive 120 hours of pre-service training followed by “On the Job” training at SYSC. A review of the curriculum topics for the training academy shows a very thorough preparation of new staff for work in a secure care environment with a challenging population of youths. New staff are mentored by veteran staff who have been specifically trained to mentor a new staff member. During the mentorship period, the new staff person must master skill levels spelled out in a two-page document. Sign off on the acquisition of the various skill levels must be by the mentor, the staff person’s immediate supervisor and the bureau’s training officer.

The need for team building to get everyone moving in the same direction was mentioned in a number of interviews with unit managers and treatment coordinators. Unit E held a team-building day away from the facility that was led by a trainer from DCYF. The unit’s treatment coordinator felt that the experience fostered a team approach on the unit.

Turnover of Staff - Turnover of full-time staff was not viewed as problematic by most of staff interviewed, but a high turnover of part-time staff was mentioned as a chronic issue. Director Bishop has converted 10 part-time positions into full-time positions in order to build a more cohesive staff on the units.

Participation in Performance-based Standards - Participation in PbS is a useful tool for indicating the lasting effects of training. The PbS cycle of improvement (data collection, analysis of site report and development of Facility Improvement Plan) affords managers the



opportunity to review the outcome data in critical areas, e.g., suicidal behavior, assaultive behavior, use of restraints and isolation, etc.) to determine specific in-service training needs for staff.

#### Findings:

- Pre-service training curriculum includes topics required for work on a secure care unit;
- Facility is inadequately staffed at times;
  - Many staff and youth residents noted staff shortages and impact on activities, especially outdoor fresh air activities;
- Staff desire additional training;
  - One Unit Manager specifically expressed interest in receiving additional training on behavioral management;
  - One staff said that not all units had been trained in Restorative Circles;
  - Need for training in team-building;
- Facility administration is supported by Performance based-Standards;
  - Data allows tracking of progress across key indicators and comparison with similar facilities nationwide;
  - Staff assisted with facility improvement planning; and
  - Receive regular consultation from PbS Coach, Dave Crowley.

#### Recommendations

- Increase staffing levels and optimize staff allocation;
  - Continue to convert as many half time positions to full time for consistence and operational management;
  - Utilize supervisors and any available facility support staff for unit shortages, to relieve staff when counseling youths in CSU, for outside coverage activities, and for additional security on trust level activities;
- Increase staff training (e.g., skill and team building);



- Two staff members specifically requested additional training on de-escalation;
- One staff member requested training in counseling;
- Continue quality assurance strategies;
  - Continue to integrate use of PbS into day to day management of SYSC; and
- Recognize and reward staff accomplishments;
  - Boost staff morale by recognizing each unit's staff monthly, quarterly, semi-annually, and annually.

#### 4. Additional Issues

Permanency Planning – The DCYF administration recognizes that many youths either return to SYSC soon after release for parole/aftercare violations or acquire new charges as adults because of a tenuous or non-existent support system in the communities they return to. Director Bishop assembled a team to develop plans for a permanency unit that would assist in the transitioning of a youth from SYSC who met the criteria for eligibility for referral to the Permanency Unit. The Permanency Unit would convene team meetings to ensure that a viable transition plan is in place when the youth is released from the facility.

##### Recommendation

- Permanency plan is thorough, well thought out and should be implemented.

Transitional Program – The DCYF administration has considered a plan to convert a vacant unit at the Center into a Transitional Unit for youths who are preparing for release home or to a community placement. The creation of such a unit would allow staff to tailor a program that meets the individual needs of a youth who will soon be released from the facility. This identifiable unit within the facility would be a tangible sign of progress for other youths at SYSC to observe and aspire to. Since the youths in the transitional program will have more access to the community, e.g., enrolling or attending school, job interviews, employment apprenticeships, etc., their coming and going each day would not be disruptive to programming throughout the facility.

##### Recommendation

- We recommend the development of the Transitional Unit

Job Readiness and/or Vocational Training and Certification for current types of work needed in communities – SYSC has more than adequate vocational facilities (automotive shop, wood shop and Kitchen facilities. They appear to be underutilized during evenings and weekends. Having



youths in the Center for 8-12 months presents a ideal opportunity to better prepare virtually unskilled adolescents to develop the necessary employment capacities (job readiness and skill level certification).

#### Recommendation

- A plan should be developed to maximize the vocational facilities at the Center by operating them during evenings and weekends.

### **5. General Comments and Observations Addressing the Achievement of the Technical Assistance Goals**

**The movement of SYSC away from a correctional model to a rehabilitative one is consistent with the direction many juvenile justice programs around the country are taking. The use of evidence-based treatment interventions such as Dialectical Behavior Treatment, Trauma Informed Treatment, Aggression Replacement Training, along with family therapy and substance abuse treatment have enriched the treatment program for youths at the Center. Many of these programs have proven results in addressing the complex needs of adolescent offenders such as serious mental health issue that result from early exposure to trauma, substance abuse and family related problems.**

**SYSC's use of outcome data to identify issues, implement changes and monitor performance contributes to the overall safety, health and quality of life for staff and youths in the program.**

**The facility itself creates an environment that is conducive to its primary purpose, the rehabilitation of adolescent offenders. The campus and building has the feel of a high school rather than a secure facility. The exterior design of the building provides the perimeter security instead of fencing topped with barbed or razor ribbon, as is often the case in most secure facilities for young offenders throughout the country. Now ten years old, SYSC is in excellent physical condition. The housing units, school, recreational facilities all contribute to the positive culture that characterizes the facility.**

NC4YC would like to thank the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Division for Children, Youth and Families for the opportunity to provide technical assistance on this project. Director Maggie Bishop and her staff were extremely cooperative and responsive, and NC4YC appreciates their candor in opening the doors to their facility and allowing access to agency staff and youth.

NC4YC is willing to provide additional consultation and assist with identifying resources and facilitating connections to improve programming and operations at the Sununu Youth Services



Center. Please contact Mr. Loughran for further requests for assistance via email at [ned.loughran@cjca.net](mailto:ned.loughran@cjca.net) or via phone at 781-843-2663.